

This Wiki

What this *is*, how to understand it, and how to make it better

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What You're Reading

A Hitchhiker's Guide to Wikis

A wiki is a conversation happening now, not a prewritten monologue. Like a garden, a wiki is best comprehended via its process of growth, and that growth always has some rough edges.

This wiki probably looks rather strange compared to, say, our public website, our official documents, or our newsletters. That's because those are *finished* things, checked, proofed, and settled before most people see them. A wiki is a radically different sort of thing, and it's worth a minute to explain how and why that's so, because that difference is part of the whole point.

This wiki is not a published book; it's instead a common notebook that everyone can write in. A wiki is most like a community garden: permanently unfinished, always a little messy, always slightly wild. It changes season over season. Sometimes people decide to change what's there, occasionally someone has to come through and trim out the weeds, or replant what's not doing so well. Many of the plants thrive, and when they do, they help to make our shared home a more lovely environment. Only, rather than turning sunlight, water, and soil into a place of rest and beauty, a wiki turns community attention and shared values into an environment of knowledge, that's readily available to everyone and serves the community's thriving.

This might help to explain a few things that could otherwise put you off:

Stubs

You'll come across pages and occasionally entire books that are barely a sentence. You'll find headings with no contents. This is not neglect, this is a *stub*. A stub is a placeholder that says "this topic belongs here, and hopefully someone will fill in the details." A good, empty stub is doing useful work; it helps to clarify the shape of what isn't yet written down, but should be. Again, a great wiki is never finished; it's always growing and adapting. That felt tension, where you see a stub and you *wish* it was filled in? That's awesome; if you know what should go there, let yourself be moved by that tension and fill it in; that's part of how the wiki grows.

Casual Tone

Much of this is written how people talk, not the way we'd word a proposal or official policy. Sometimes things are unclear. This is a deliberate tradeoff! A wiki works best when writing something down is fast and low-stakes. If every contribution has to be polished enough to publish between hard covers, then almost nobody contributes, and their knowledge stays locked inside their heads -- and then, eventually lost. If something feels too loose for what it's describing, if it

bothers you and you think you could say it better, then you can fix it. You can fix it right now!

But ... Chaos?

I keep saying *you can fix things*. In particular, any resident of Nyland is allowed to edit almost any of these pages at any time. You might think this leads to immediate chaos, but it's not as bad as you might expect, because each old version of a page is saved, too, and someone else can just come along and fix up a page by reverting it more quickly than someone who means well can do damage.

Dealing with deliberate vandals can be a problem on higher-visibility, totally public wikis like Wikipedia, but even then it's not that hard. You just take vandals' editing permissions away, and then revert their changes. As a community wiki, I don't expect this to ever be a real issue.

The Big Idea to Take Away

This wiki is *for* and *by* Nyland residents. It's only as good as the community makes it, and "the community" includes *you*. You don't need to learn anything technical to help. If you know something a page gets wrong or leaves thin, the value you'd add by saying so (even to someone else who types it in!) is *exactly* the sort of communal memory this wiki is meant to cultivate.

Those who founded this community, or who have been here for a while, already understand why that communal memory matters, and how easily it evaporates. This wiki is just a place to keep it: that we control, that will still be here in twenty and thirty and fifty years, and that doesn't belong to anyone but *us*.

Nyland Wiki How-To

This [wiki](#) is Nyland's own instance of [Bookstack](#), "a simple, self-hosted, easy-to-use platform for organising and storing information."

We're still testing it out, so the information you'll find here is certainly incomplete, and the organization of things is likely to change rapidly. However, for the knowledge that *is* here, you'll find it much easier to find things than before, because Bookstack has a `▢ search bar▢` .

Useful Parts of the BookStack Manual

Reading and Finding Information

Honestly, you can probably find everything here by clicking around; it's designed to be fairly friendly to that.

A little orientation may help. Every piece of information on this website is part of a *Page*. Each Page belongs to some *Book*, and the Pages in a Book can be further organized into *Chapters*. You can see all the Books on this site by clicking on the "Books" icon, in the navigation bar at the very top of every page.

- Shelves, Books, Chapters, and Pages: [How content is arranged in BookStack](#)
- [Getting Around and Finding Content](#)
- [Searching Content](#)

Logging In

To do more than just read, you'll need to be set up with a [Nylandish Login](#). If you're a resident, you probably already have a user with an email address on that site; if you've never logged in before, try the ["Forgot username or password?" link](#). Contact Matt Elder if you're a Nyland resident and you'd like to login, but setting or resetting your password is not working for you.

Once you've logged in there, click the "Log In" button at the top of a wiki page, and you should automatically be logged in here, too.

Making Comments

If you'd like to add notes to a page, like to ask a question, express a disagreement, or suggest edits, you can also leave *comments* on pages. There's an "add comment" button at the bottom of every page's content, and comments will show up at the bottom of the page. (I've left one here, as

an example.)

Adding and Organizing Information

All the content on this website is written up by Nyland folk. If you're a Nyland resident, you can edit (nearly) everything you see, once you're logged in. On a full-sized screen, click the "edit" link. On a small screen like on a phone, find the "edit" link under the "info" tab at the top of the page.

The editor is relatively simple, and probably a familiar interface. Its shortcuts are documented [here](#).

Feel free to tinker with things in the [the Scratch Notebook](#); that's there explicitly so you can try things out in the editor and make arbitrary "mistakes" without damaging anything anyone will rely on later.

If you're already familiar with Markdown, you might like the [Markdown editor mode](#). However, please switch back to the "WYSIWYG" mode before you save. Otherwise, the next user may get dropped in the Markdown editor, which may cause stress and confusion.

If you're worried about how to use all these tools, I strongly recommend [these guidelines] for styling documents on these pages.

You can also upload images with the editor's image button, and you can [attach files](#) to a page. This is a fine way to save additional files, like images and scanned documents, but it's not the best way to store things like Google Docs or Word Docs. Instead, import text from written docs as a page, because:

- The contents of pages on this site are searchable, but the contents of attachments are not.
- It's *much easier* for people to read a page of this website than it is for them to open a file -- especially a Word doc or Google doc, which they might not have a convenient way to read.
- Pages are really easy to link to from other pages; attached files much less so.
- Pages are easy for the whole community to update and keep edited (and to watch revisions of!), attached files much less so.
- In general, this whole site works only if pages are the central content.

Style Guide

The Guidelines

We want our pages to be very easy to read, even on tiny screens or in low light. We also want our pages to be easy to write. So, if you're trying to make a page look cleaner, observe these guidelines:

- Presenting things as whole sentences, in lists or paragraphs, is often the best choice.
- Links to key concepts or context are profoundly and surprisingly useful - especially in a wiki like this.
- Headers, as chosen from the styles dropdown, are great.
- Use bold or italics sparingly. When many words are emphasized, none really stand out, and the page looks worse overall.
- Use tables for tabular data, but not for general page layout. In general, don't attempt fancy page layouts, just write documents top to bottom! (This will be more consistent across all pages, be easier for others to edit in the future, and work when people want to read on a tiny screen.)

But Don't Worry About the Guidelines

All that said, if you're writing information on this site at all, and you hope for it to be useful to Nylanders later, then:

- You are doing great
- That is *awesome*, *thank you*
- Don't stress about formatting.

I've conjured up these guidelines as if they're very strict, but if you write something down that someone else might use later, then you are *winning* at the wiki game. That's the whole point.

These guidelines are just here if you're *inclined* to sweat these sorts of details, and if that makes you want a "proper style" of some sort. As such, this guide is intended to be directional but not prescriptive -- so, if someone edits just the styling on some page, let's view it as constructive if it brings the page closer to these guidelines, and let's view it as destructive if it takes the page further away from these guidelines.

Again, don't sweat it. The point of a page is not its styling, the point of a page is the knowledge it collects, represents, and preserves.